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SNAPSHOT The City and Us

With USAID support, the city and its residents assume responsibility for the cleanliness of Tirin Kot



Photo: USAID/RAMP UP

Ghafoor Jan, sitting in front of his shop, in downtown Tirin Kot, the provincial capital of Uruzgan. The street was cleaned by municipal workers. Ghafoor Jan cleans the immediate area around his shop every morning to help it stay clean.

USAID assisted the municipality of Tirin Kot to clean the city, enhancing the visibility of the municipality in providing services for the residents.

Tirin Kot, the capital of conflict-ridden Uruzgan Province in southern Afghanistan, is a serious concern for those who strive to end the conflict and establish peace in Afghanistan. Due to its isolation and volatile environment, foreign assistance rarely reaches the city. Those trying to end the conflict and build peace agree that trust and cooperation between Afghan citizens and their government are cornerstones for lasting peace.

For decades, Afghans have turned away from their government because of what they perceived to be a lack of interest or capacity to respond to citizens' concerns. And their concerns are simple: clean and healthy environment is among the first.

In Tirin Kot, opinions are now changing. Ask the residents what they saw this summer:

From June to September, municipal cleaners in bright blue overalls and orange vests swept everything clean. They emptied drains and dumpsites and collected refuse from pavements and footpaths in the Kaman bazaar and residential areas. Four large garbage trucks relieved the city of some 5,800 loads of accumulated waste.

"It's not only that it's clean to the eye now, but the foul smell is gone too. People do not want to shop in a dirty place," said Rahimullah, a young man who owns a small grocery shop "Finally, the municipality is doing something for us."

Ghafoor Jan adds, "It's our job too," he says. After the municipal cleaners emptied the collective bins, Ghafoor and other shopkeepers started cleaning up around their shops every day to keep up with the new standards of cleanliness. "The city does its part, but it's up to us not to litter and to take our garbage to the bins."

Trust is built with small daily gestures of help given and returned. A shopkeeper's, "Salaam, good morning," to these blue-and-orange uniformed workers on a clean street is a good way for the residents of Tirin Kot to embrace their city and government as their own.